

FUMITORY

FUMARIA MURALIS

Why is it a weed?

It competes with plants for sunlight and nutrients and can cause severe lodging* in certain crops.

Where is it found?

All over New Zealand.

Is it toxic?

Possibly. Reports are sketchy at best but it does contain a number of alkaloids that would be toxic in overdose.

Alternative Uses?

Has some uses as a herbal medicine, but be careful – see above!



MILTON MUNRO

Fumitory is a particularly nasty sucker. In fact I would go so far as to say it is one weed I really detest.

In the early years of my career I spent a lot of time walking the cereal crops of North Otago. This weed was the bane of their paddocks, climbing up the crops and dragging (lodging)* them down to the ground.

Fumitory is an annual weed found commonly all over New Zealand. It's originally native to Europe but has spread all around the globe and is pretty much found everywhere.

Fumitory is a member of the Papaveraceae or poppy family, but the name actually applies to over 40 different species of plant. The best known is *Fumaria muralis* or scrambling fumitory.

MILTON MUNRO is a soil and plant scientist for rural supply company PGG Wrightson. He looks at common pasture weeds you'll find on your block and how to deal with them.

The word fumitory has an interesting Latin root – it means 'smoke of the earth'. I'm not sure why it got that name – it may be because of its tendency to choke out other plants. If anyone does know why, let me know!

It is used in a number of herbal medicines but you should be careful with it as it contains a number of nasty alkaloids that can have toxic side effects.

Fumitory is relatively straight-forward to identify. The first giveaway clue is its stem. It has a weak fleshy stem that cannot support the weight of the plant. It creeps along the ground until it finds another plant it can climb up and sprawl all over. This is what causes the damage in cereal crops and it's this sprawling weed mass that causes the crop to fall over, making harvesting very difficult.

Initially it produces three small pale green leaflets at branching points along the stem. These leaves soon become single leaflets as the plant grows.

The flowers of fumitory are very distinctive. They produce about a dozen white/pink florets with a distinctive purple colouring at the end of them.

Fumitory is a particularly aggressive seeder, producing many seeds with very high viability and longevity in the soil. If fumitory is allowed to seed in a paddock then you are stuck with it for a long time.

How to control it

Controlling fumitory is easy in a garden but somewhat difficult in a crop. Its weak stem makes fumitory very easy to extract by hand – pulling is easy, effective and very satisfying. It can also be controlled with the use of glyphosate.

In a cereal or pasture, fumitory control can be more problematic. It is resistant to a number of chemicals but in a pinch MCPA does a good job of controlling fumitory when the plants are small. However, remember that MCPA will be very hard on your clover.

Keep the emails coming – I love to hear from you all! ■

DO YOU NEED HELP WITH A WEED PROBLEM?

If anyone has a request for a particular weed they would like to know more about please don't hesitate to let Milton know: mmunro@pggwrightson.co.nz

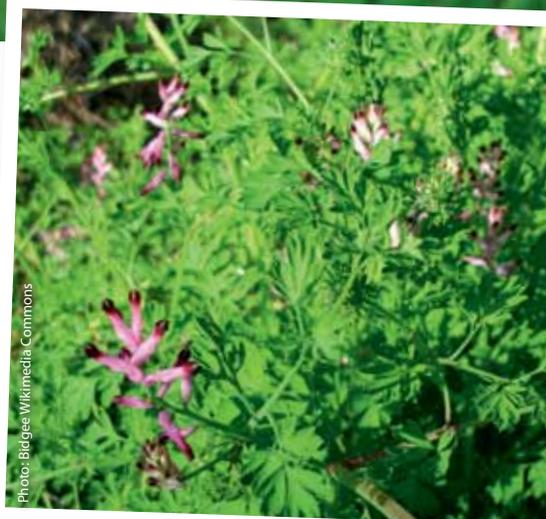
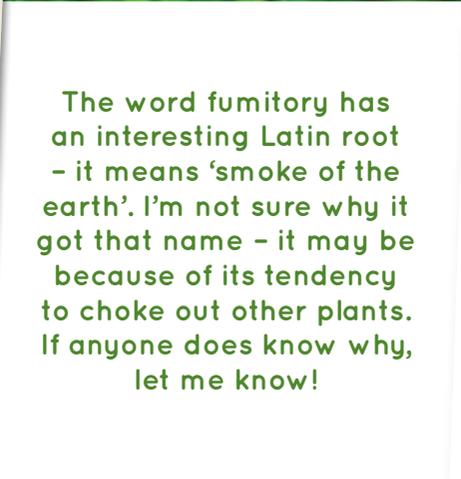


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